Royal College of Pathologists

Examination regulations - 2018

FORENSIC PATHOLOGY

These regulations must be read in conjunction with the *Regulations and Guidelines – College examinations for Membership and Diplomas*.

Candidates wishing to pursue a career in forensic pathology should do so with a sound background in histopathology, such that they have a satisfactory knowledge of disease mechanisms and systemic pathology, and a more than adequate familiarity with autopsy techniques and microscopy.

Two examination routes are possible:

- Part 1 FRCPath in histopathology followed by Part 2 in forensic pathology
- Parts 1 and 2 FRCPath in histopathology followed by the Diploma in forensic pathology.

ENTRY & TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

There is no specific timing for entry to the examination. Candidates should obtain guidance from their educational supervisor as to when to sit the examination. Planning should take into account planned CCT date (where applicable) but candidates should apply only when they are ready. Some general guidance is given below, but apart from the sequence in which the examinations can be sat is not intended to be prescriptive.

Whichever examination route is chosen, at the end of any training programme candidates should have acquired a broad knowledge of medicolegal systems and legal aspects of clinical practice, familiarity in performing post-mortem examinations in a wide range of natural and non-natural deaths, including specialist techniques and related investigations, and an awareness of the responsibilities involved in dealing with suspicious deaths and of giving evidence in courts.

Part 1

Trainees will normally require two years' experience of specialty training in Histopathology in order to achieve the standard required to pass the Part 1 Examination.

Part 2

Candidates with the Part 1 examination in general histopathology wishing to take the Part 2 examination in forensic pathology must have been training for at least 4½ years, of which 3½ must have been in the specialist/specialty registrar grade and to have included two years of forensic pathology training in an approved programme. Prior to completion of training (end of Stage D), candidates must also have had at least three months' experience in each of neuropathology and paediatric pathology with two months of each on formal attachment. It is expected that candidates will have completed the majority of this training prior to attempting the Part 2 examination.

STRUCTURE AND FORMAT OF THE EXAMINATION

Part 1

Candidates will take the general histopathology Part 1 MCQ/EMQ (see the Histopathology regulations for further details).

Part 2

The Part 2 examination will comprise a submission of a casebook and a practical/oral examination.

Casebook
Candidates should also read the section on 'Guidance for candidates undertaking written options for the Part 2 examination' in the ***Regulations and Guidelines – College examinations for Membership and Diplomas.***

Submission of a casebook of 10 medico-legal cases, covering a wide spectrum of forensic work is required. The intention of the casebook is to demonstrate that candidates have had an adequate exposure to different types of cases during their training, are capable of drawing appropriate conclusions from the findings and are able to formulate good quality reports with well reasoned discussions, in the context of key literature.

The overall length of the casebook should be no more than 20000 words excluding references and should not normally exceed this length. The word count must be stated in the casebook. The casebook must be submitted to the College at least four months (i.e. by September of the preceding year for the Spring session and March of the same year for the Autumn session) before the entry closing date of the Part 2 examination for which the candidate wishes to enter.

Candidates will not be allowed to sit the practical and oral examination until the casebook has been awarded a pass mark by the examiners

Practical and oral examination
Practical and oral examination is a three-day examination designed to assess the competence of candidates to practice forensic pathology independently and includes the following sections:

Autopsy	May include special dissection techniques.
Microscopy	Histological examination of 20 sections, to include material not only of overt medicolegal interest but from any aspect of general histopathology relevant to autopsy practice.
Case reports	Preparation of reports based on documents and other material, which may include toxicological analyses.
Gross specimens	'Wet tissues', bones, X-rays, etc.
Oral	With emphasis on aspects of forensic practice not covered elsewhere, which might include ethical, legal and management issues.
Written	short answer three hour exam

The written paper will cover any aspect of forensic/autopsy pathology which might also include topics such as service provision, quality assurance and relevant legal issues. Candidates should ensure that they are fully aware and have covered the forensic histopathology curriculum.

Each section of the examination assesses a distinct set of professional skills, each essential to the performance of an independent medical practitioner in forensic histopathology. Candidates must therefore pass each section of the examination in a single sitting.

Should a candidate make one or more egregious errors that are of medico-legal significance and undermine the examiners' confidence that the candidate has reached the stage of independent consultant practice in forensic histopathology, the College's egregious errors policy will be followed (see section 9.5 of the examinations Regulations and Guidelines).

Diploma in Forensic Pathology

This qualification is intended for those who have pursued the full FRCPath in histopathology and who then wish to specialise in forensic pathology. The requirements are similar to those for the Part 2 in forensic pathology.

The examination may be taken after a period of training, which has included a minimum of two years' substantial involvement in Coronial/Fiscal autopsy practice, of which at least 18 months must have been in forensic pathology departments approved by the College. Candidates must also have had at least three months' experience in each of neuropathology and paediatric pathology, although the qualifications in regard to this time period, outlined in the Part 2 FRCPath above, would equally apply here.

The examination has two components.

- **Casebook:** a casebook of 10 medicolegal cases, the purpose and format of which is exactly the same as for the Part 2 FRCPath. Candidates submitting a satisfactory casebook but failing to achieve the required standard in other components of the examination will not be required to submit a new casebook at any subsequent attempt at the examination.
- **Written and Practical examination:** the same format as for Part 2 FRCPath, to comprise a written paper, autopsy, microscopy, case reports, gross specimens and oral.

Candidates must pass each component of the examination in a single sitting. Should a candidate make one or more egregious errors that are of medico-legal significance and undermine the examiners' confidence that the candidate has reached the stage of independent consultant practice in forensic histopathology, the College's egregious errors policy will be followed (see section 9.5 of the examinations Regulations and Guidelines).

TIMING OF THE EXAMINATIONS

The Part 2 and Diploma examinations will be offered twice a year in Spring and Autumn.

Examinations Department
The Royal College of Pathologists
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